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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CAPE TOWN 000233

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SUBJECT: METHAMPHETAMINE-A GROWING PROBLEM IN CAPE TOWN

11. (U) An article in the November 17 2008 edition of the Cape Times reported that, according to the Medical Research Council (MRC), Cape Town has become the methamphetamine capital of South Africa, with 98 percent of patients seen across the provinces coming from this city.

12. (U) Methamphetamine, or Tik as it is commonly known in South Africa, is a white, odorless, bitter crystalline powder, which dissolves easily in water or alcohol, it is a powerful stimulant that affects the central nervous system and is highly addictive. It is easy to ingest, most commonly from a light bulb heated from below to produce fumes that can be inhaled. Dopamine levels in the body which are responsible for keeping a person happy, stable and balanced are reduced by Tik usage. Through ageing a normal person loses between five and ten percent of their dopamine over ten years. According to the MRC, Tik users are losing 40 percent to 50 percent every two years and once the levels in the brain drop below 50 percent the risk of Parkinson's Disease increases. Hospitals in Cape Town are now seeing 34-year-olds being treated for Parkinson's, the direct result of Tik usage.

13. (U) The MRC estimates that nowhere else in the world has Tik grown as quickly as in the poorer coloured communities of the Western Cape, surpassing mandrax as the drug of choice. Five years ago just 15 cases involving Tik were reported in the Western Cape. Last year this had increased to 2,628 cases with 91 percent of the users being coloured males between the ages of 12 and 21.

14. (U) The increase in gangs in the Western Cape has been a cause for concern in recent years. Street gangs have a long history in Cape Town, dating back to the aftermath of the Second World War when they grew rapidly due to returning servicemen. Large-scale forced removals of coloured, under apartheid during the 1960s eroded social controls, creating an environment of increased criminal activity. These factors coupled with South Africa's high unemployment rate has narrowed opportunities for young people and created the perfect environment for drug dealers and gangs to profit. Communities are seeing an increase in gang activity and crime directly as a result of Tik usage.

15. (U) The increase in the use and addiction of Tik is not only a social problem, but is having a larger impact on economic and security issues. According to the South African Police Services (SAPS), 60 percent of all crimes are related to substance abuse, and in the Western Cape that figure is closer to 80 percent largely as a result of Tik. The perpetrators of these crimes are either under the influence of Tik, or trying to secure money for their next fix. The Central Drug Authority estimates that the socio-economic costs of drug abuse are R20 billion every year. The direct economic impact of Tik can be found in a study released in July by the Small Business Project in the Western Cape. The study found that more than half of small businesses in the region had experienced at least one incident of crime in the last year. Small businesses lose up to 20 percent of their turnover to crime. According to the government's crime statistics, robberies from business premises have increased by 47.4 percent since last year. In short Tik is driving crime up and the economy down.

16. (U) Confidence in the criminal justice system is at an all time

low and the situation is aggravated by the drug dealers and Tik users. Drug syndicates often have members of the police service on their payroll. To make matters worse, it has been noted that drug Qtheir payroll. To make matters worse, it has been noted that drug cases tend to drag on for months or years in court, to the point where witnesses either lose interest, are threatened not to testify or in some instances are killed. Crime is also a key factor in the brain drain, over half of South Africans who emigrate cite crime and corruption as their main reason for leaving. When they leave, they take their skills and capital with them and drastically reduce the prospects for growth and job creation for the unemployed.

¶7. (U) According to the MRC, Tik is also a sexual stimulant and will certainly impact upon the transmission of HIV through unprotected sex. Cape Town has seen a rise in HIV infection rates, which has been linked to the growing popularity of Tik. In addition, the backroom laboratories manufacturing the drug have to be cleared by teams specializing in biohazardous matter, due to the health hazards of the by-products of manufacturing Tik. This poses an additional drain on already overextended resources and leads to service delivery problems.

¶8. (U) Illegal drugs in South Africa are not only a threat to health and social development; they are becoming an issue of national security. The Institute for Security Studies released a report in May 2007 which said that while coloured gangs are believed to produce and control Tik, the Chinese mafia is the main supplier of the production ingredients. The report also noted that greater international cooperation is essential if the authorities are going to make significant inroads into the illegal drug trade.

¶9. (U) Comment: As it is linked to health and security issues, Tik

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is fast becoming a political platform and campaign issue in the Western Cape. Local opposition parties are placing more emphasis on the messages of drug prevention and are blaming the increase in gangs, Tik, and crime on poor governance. The governments disbanding of the South African Narcotics Bureau (SANAB) in 2004 is being directly linked to the increase in drug-related crimes and the disbanding of the Scorpions is used as further evidence of government's inability to effectively rule. As many of the poorer coloured communities are directly affected by gangs and drugs, anyone campaigning on this platform will be well received. End comment.